



Montana National Guard PDHRA Campaign Plan Summary of Accomplishments Membership Progress Update

Prepared by COL Jeff Ireland 18 January 2008



The Montana National Guard formed a Post Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA) Task Force in April 2006 to evaluate and confirm the adequacy of our redeployment processes. Although the Task Force confirmed that the Montana National Guard was following (many cases exceeding) established program guidelines, 14 recommendations were generated in an effort to help improve the program. The Montana National Guard committed to implementing all Task Force Recommendations. The PDHRA Campaign Plan Deployment Cycle Support outlines our plan of action to address the Task Force recommendations.

This summary is provided to ensure that our members have visibility and awareness of our efforts in improving the redeployment and reconstitution processes in the Montana National Guard.

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Task Force Recommendations for the MTNG

- 1 Evaluate medical status before discharge
- 2 Allow Guardsmen to request honorable discharge
- 3 Thoroughly review all Guard PDHRA personnel files for completion
- 4 Expand the PDHRA Process
- 5 Mandate Enrollment in the VA Healthcare System
- 6 Guardsmen receive awards and medals w/in 90 days
- 7 Send badge information to DoD w/in 90 days
- 8 Include mental health focus in training
- 9 Increase awareness of available resources
- 10 Create Crisis Response Team
- 11 Allow drill attendance upon return home
- 12 Increase informal support systems - Vet2Vet
- 13 Enhance Family Readiness Program
- 14 Form partnership with State Veteran's Groups

PDHRA Campaign Plan Summary of Accomplishments

Modified Discharge Process

The discharge process was modified to incorporate an additional series of reviews prior to approval. In addition to the current command review, additional reviews were added for medical, legal, and senior leadership. The purpose is to confirm that and OIF/OEF discharge request is not related to a PTSD or other combat issue.

Developed Crisis Response Team

Two Crisis Response Teams were created. One team is located in Helena and the other in Great Falls. The purpose of the Crisis Response Team is to evaluate, analyze, and advise unit representatives, Guardsmen, and/or their families on situations that involve National Guard Members affected by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI), or other traumatic life events. Additional guidelines and unit posters will be distributed shortly to announce this resource and access procedures.

Modified PDHRA Process

The current PDHRA process, conducted within 90-180 days after redeployment, has been extended out to 2 years. Redeploying Soldiers and Airmen will receive a behavioral health review either through a Post Deployment Health Reassessment or a Periodic Health Assessment every 6-months for 2 years.

Mandated Enrollment into VA System

All returning Soldiers and Airmen are now required to complete the VA Form 1010 EZ to enroll for VA benefits. This will expedite follow-on care through the VA if it becomes necessary.

Suicide Prevention and PTSD/mTBI Training

Increased training has been conducted on suicide prevention, PTSD, and mTBI. Suicide training was conducted in all units in September/October 2007. PTSD/mTBI Outreach training was conducted in all units in October/November 2007 by trained Montana counselors. Focused resource/benefit information (to include a copy of the book Down Range to Iraq and Back) was distributed in July 2007, and outreach was conducted to increase awareness of the National Guard Transition Assistance Advisor (TAA) Mr. Dave Lake. Our efforts will continue through website modifications, ongoing unit training, and partnerships with community organizations.

Reaffirmed Drill Attendance Policy

A policy letter was published to reaffirm a Soldier's (ARNG only) ability to drill immediately upon redeployment for the first 90-days (currently identified as a "no drill" period.)

Hired a PDHRA Program Manager

A full time ASDO PDHRA Program Manager was hired. This position will manage the PDHRA process and our efforts in implementing the actions of the PDHRA Campaign Plan.

Redesigned MTNG Website – Yellow Ribbon

The Montana National Guard website located at www.montanaguard.com was updated to include information on the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon program. The website consolidates related information to help minimize confusion when benefits are needed. As we move forward, a separate PDHRA website will be developed to further enhance this effort.

Implemented Periodic Health Assessment

The Periodic Health Assessment (PHA) was implemented in June, 2007. This new program replaces the former Annual Medical Certificate and 5-year physical program with an annual medical review. The new review is required every year. It includes a self assessment complimented by a medical examination and face-to-face with a physician or physician's assistant.

Redesigned Individual Mobilization Process

Soldiers who volunteer to mobilize, an individual augmentee, now receive the same redeployment information as units who redeploy. A checklist ensures that all necessary stations are now completed before a Soldier is released.

Honorable Discharge Policy

Published a policy memorandum to allow Guardsmen to request an honorable discharge based on deployment related PTSD or mTBI difficulties.

Expanded Family Resource Centers

Additional funding resources have allowed the National Guard Family Program to hire two contracted part time Family Assistant Coordinators to be located in for Billings and Kalispell. These contract positions have been advertised and will be filled shortly.

Increased Family Communications

The Family Program has expanded their efforts to provide information and additional focus on PTSD/mTBI signs and symptoms along with resource information for families. The family program is also developing a consolidated resource guide to further enhance information access and availability.

State Veteran's Affairs - MT Mental Health Assn

The State Department of Veteran's Affairs has partnered with the Montana Mental Health Association to air a variety of state-wide Public Service Announcement radio spots from 9 Jan 2008 through 19 March 2008.

Received Additional PDHRA Cycle from OSD

Senator Baucus and Senator Tester met with Dr. Chu, Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, DoD, and secured an additional PDHRA cycle for Montana. This will allow us to expand our current review out to the 2-year mark.

ITO's for Family Members

National Guard Bureau extended funding to the Montana National Guard to place family members on orders to attend Deployment Cycle Support (DCS) events. This will assist us in involving all families in the redeployment training.

PDHRA Campaign Plan Future Opportunities

NGB Pilot Program

National Guard Bureau is considering using Montana as a pilot site to evaluate the effectiveness of locating a behavioral healthcare specialist on the JFHQ staff and to incorporate a face-to-face behavioral health component in the Periodic Health Assessment program.

Joint Family Support Assistance Program

Montana has submitted a request to the National Guard Bureau to participate in the Joint Family Support Assistance Program. This program would extend three new positions to our Family Programs to assist with family and youth outreach. These positions include a Child and Youth Specialist and two Military Family Benefits Specialists.

Community Partnership Program

The Montana National Guard Public Affairs Office is developing a PTSD Outreach Video to be used as an educational piece to help build stronger community partnerships with Medical (behavioral health care providers), Ministerial (area churches), Veteran Services Organizations (American Legion, VFW, and DAV), State (DPHHS), Federal (OSD, NGB), and Employers located throughout the state.

Military Child Education Coalition

The Montana National Guard is in negotiation with the Military Child Education Coalition for the conduct of a focused training event for Montana teachers. This training will orient our educators to the challenges of deployment and the effects it can have on our military children.

JFHQ and Med Det TDA Requests

Requests were submitted to the National Guard Bureau to modify the JFHQ and Med Det TDAs to add permanent behavioral health staff positions.

Summary

Although there is still much left to do, we have accomplished a lot since the release of the Task Force report in June 2007. The leadership of the Montana National Guard has taken the Task Force recommendations seriously and made the PDHRA program one of our top priorities.

We will continue to publish periodic updates to keep you informed of our progress.

